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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a narrative describing a Spanish/English bilingual teacher's experience in building a validating community for Mien students and their parents in the classroom and the larger school context. The larger study of which this one is a part drew from teacher research, teacher narrative, and teacher voice. Data were collected through interviews with bilingual teachers with interesting tales to tell regarding their personal and professional experiences in bilingual classes. Topics covered in this narrative include student histories; their immigration experiences; class structure and discussion techniques; parental involvement and parent-teacher relationships; course content; community support; and school governance. This teacher collaborated with parents and other members of the community to teach the Mien language to the children and enable parents to teach what was important to their children. Her ability to form a community of learners came from her deep respect for the children and their parents. It is concluded that a hard-working, creative teacher can effect positive change in the classroom, but for a change to endure, the school culture needs broad-based support mechanisms. (Contains 16 references.) (CK)

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HOW A SPANISH BILINGUAL TEACHER BUILDS COMMUNITY IN A MIEN BILINGUAL CLASS

Introduction

Teachers' efforts often go unnoticed because of the isolating structure of schools. Bilingual teachers' work is even less visible because they teach marginalized non-mainstream populations (Goldstein, 1987). Bilingual teachers' consistently make great efforts to affect language minority students and their parents. This close contact between bilingual teachers and parents, not only influences student achievement, but facilitates families' adjustment to American life (Lemberger, 1990). This study makes visible one Spanish/English bilingual teacher's extraordinary innovative practice in building a validating community for Southeast Asian Mien students and parents in the classroom and in the larger school context. This study is part of a book, Bilingual Education: Teachers' Narratives (Lemberger, in press), of nine bilingual education teachers' practices, dilemmas and coping strategies that gives an inside view of what it means to be a bilingual teacher. Narrative is used to specify and describe practice grounded in context, rather than to generalize about bilingual teaching.

Theoretical Perspectives

This qualitative study sees teachers' experiences as contributing to a practical knowledge base on teaching (Shulman, 1986). The interrelated theoretical frames of this study are derived from: teacher research, teacher narrative and teacher voice. Teacher research aims to describe school and classroom-

based questions, complexities and contexts of teaching and learning through systematic inquiry conducted either by teachers themselves or in collaboration with reseachers (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1990). Teacher research can provide "insights into the particulars of how and why something works and for whom, within in the contexts of particular classrooms" (Zumwalt, 1982, p. 235, cited in Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1990).

Connolly and Clandinin (1990) stated that narrative is both a phenomenon and method of inquiry. As a phenomenon, narratives are the stories which characterize human experience. As an inquiry method, "narrative names the structured quality of experience and its patterns" (p. 2). Stories "have the power to direct and change our lives" (Noddings, 1991, cited in Carter, 1993). They are powerful tools for teacher reflection and change because they can capture the richness and variety of teachers' experiences and actions, and describe the complexity of what teaching is (Carter, 1993). Through narrative, the reader can vicariously walk in another's shoes and entertain ideas and other positions.

Calls have been made for teachers' voices to be heard in the discourse on educational research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1990; Carter, 1993). Hargreaves (1996) in "Revisiting Voice," explained that many recent teacher voice studies have portrayed a decontextualized romanticized view of teachers that fits researchers' visions of effective practice rather than the reality in schools. To strengthen teacher voice research, he

suggested that teacher voice studies be contextualized and that the voices from disaffected/marginalized teachers be included. This teacher's story addresses Hargreaves' suggestions by highlighting a very different voice which shows how she created meaningful practice and support networks where none existed.

Methodology

Selection, Data Collection and Narrative Construction

In collecting the data for Bilingual Education: Teachers' Narratives (Lemberger, in press), I was looking for committed bilingual teachers with interesting stories to tell. Lily Wong Fillmore, a renown researcher and linguist, told me about Julia's extraordinary work with the Mien community. When I contacted her, she gladly agreed to be interviewed and to help write the narrative. For 3-4 hours, we talked about her life, school and teaching experiences (See Appendix A-Sample Interview Questions). The audiotaped discussions were informal and semi-structured, much like what Mishler (1986) and Dobbert (1982) advocated, where the purpose is to capture the practitioner's experiences in her own words. I promised to respect Julia's anonymity, which enabled her to talk freely.

The interview questions were just a starting point. I encouraged Julia to share her personal and professional experiences. My own bilingual education experiences as a teacher, a staff developer, researcher, and teacher educator helped me probe for salient bilingual education issues. Because Julia was no longer teaching at the time, we observed videotapes

of her practice, which greatly enhanced my understanding of her.

In writing the narrative, I wanted to maintain the essence of her story. Rather than writing the narrative "about" Julia, I used the first person, so her words speak directly to the reader, while maintaining a storied quality. Julia then reviewed the first draft to verify its accuracy. I wanted to make sure the details and tone respectfully portrayed her story. With her feedback, I reworked the narrative, cutting, clarifying, and tightening up the spoken word into written text. Her reaction to the narrative was that it sounded very much like her.

In the narrative, my voice is merged with Julia's, demonstrating what Connolly and Clandinin (1990) called, the "Multiple I's" where it's not just the teacher's voice that is heard but the researcher's as well. My story is told implicitly in what I focused on in the interview, what I included in the narrative, and how I interpreted the story. I have tried to convey Julia's words and story, a story that might not have been told if not for our collaboration. Julia felt honored to participate on this study. Her story is an especially important one because it shows what a talented teacher can accomplish in a seemingly impossible situation.

Julia's Story

Background and Entry into the Profession

My ancestors are originally from Norway. I grew up in a Southern California beach community, where I took Spanish in high school. Since literature has always my passion, I majored in it

at a Northern California University. After finishing my BA, I got a secondary teaching credential. At 23, I got a job at a Southern Californian high school where I taught the "low" track English classes to primarily minority and ESL students. A year and half later, I was fired for teaching minority literature (e.g., Alice Walker's (1982), The Color Purple), because it wasn't on the curriculum. Getting fired shook me up and made me strongly question whether I wanted to stay in education or leave the profession.

Three years later, I relocated back to a Northern Californian city to go graduate school. I also started substitute teaching in a small Spanish bilingual elementary school, mostly in kindergarten. I just fell in love with the kindergarten world. The next year, I had my own Spanish bilingual kindergarten class in that school. I got certified as a Spanish/English bilingual teacher by taking the Bilingual Certificate of Competence Exam.

The following year, the principal was not able to offer me a contract to stay at that school. Another principal from a very large school, however, offered me a tenure-track bilingual position. I assumed it would be for a Spanish bilingual class. He gave that class to another new teacher who didn't speak Spanish. He gave me a Mien kindergarten class, assuring me that I could handle it because "bilingual is bilingual." Having gotten fired, I wanted a secure position. So I accepted it without knowing the Mien language or culture or even that much

about bilingual teaching.

This K-6 school had over 1350 students. It was located in a dangerous neighborhood full of drugs, crime and gangs. The school was on a year-round schedule and there were eight classes per grade. The diverse population included Latino, African-American, Cambodian, Cantonese, Vietnamese and Mien children. About 80% of the school population was non-native speakers of English with over 420 Mien Limited English Proficient children.

Who Are The Mien and How Did They Get Here?

During the Vietnam war, the agrarian hill tribe people of Laos, which included the Mien, Hmong and Khmuu, collaborated with the CIA to fight against the Communists. In 1975, when they lost the war, many of these people were persecuted or killed as a result of their involvement with the U.S. military. Eventually, the CIA moved many of them to Thai refugee camps, where they stayed for years waiting for resettlement. According to Contreras-Polk (1994), of the 350,000 Lao refugees who left their homeland, most (about 192,000) were moved to the United States. Australia, New Zealand, and Canada also opened the doors to these refugees. About 68,000 are still in the refugee camps.

In the camps, life for families and their children was horrendous. Children often had to stand guard. Women and girls were often raped. The Mien have experienced considerable trauma as a result of war, leaving their homeland, living in refugee camps, and adjusting to life in a new country. Many of the families receive some sort of public assistance services.

The Mien Bilingual Program

The school has both Spanish and Mien transitional bilingual education programs that aim for children to mainstream into the English program as quickly as possible. All 13 Mien bilingual classes are on one of the four year-round tracks. Unfortunately, no class, except for mine, provided any Mien native language instruction. Because there were no certified Mien-speaking "bilingual" teachers, the teachers were English-speakers (11 Caucasian and 2 African-American) without any knowledge about the language or culture. Since Mien was not officially considered a written language, the teachers were excused from learning it. The teachers and administrators were very unclear about what they were doing and what the law would permit. They really had no idea about bilingual education goals, purposes or methods. All the teachers (but me) conducted instruction in English. They had no idea of the value of using the native language. They weren't sensitive about what is needed to learn a second language. They could not relate to the these young immigrant children, who were facing an entire world in a different language and culture. Though full time Mien-speaking teaching assistants were assigned to each class, the teachers prohibited them from speaking any Mien. In my classroom, I took advantage of my assistant's native language resources and asked him not to speak English, unless he had to speak to me.

Beginning to Teach Mien Children

Each year, I had from 28-30 Mien children in my kindergarten

class. I taught that grade for the next four years, until I left teaching to do my doctoral work. Kindergarten was a good place for me because I had a lot of freedom. Since my room was on the bottom floor, the administration had no idea of what I was doing. We took lots of field trips, at least twice a week, to the library and later on around the community. No one ever knew if I was on or off campus. And they probably didn't care either, which meant that we never had crayons, pencils, or paper. It didn't matter because I was always trying to get somebody to give us this stuff. And they did, because I humbled myself and begged for the children. I scavenged paper from huge recycling bins, so we always had plenty of drawing paper. We never had xerox or ditto paper, but fortunately we didn't need very much of that.

I taught the afternoon session from 12:20 to 3:00PM. The kids came early at 11:00 for "Discovery Time," where they could explore and revisit anything we had done in the past, such as, journal writing, literature or science experiments. Children need time to play with materials over and over again, pour things, make bubbles and mess around. Not everybody gets the 'aha' moment the when they first experience it, sometimes they need more time and exposure. Since Discovery was before the official class time, I didn't have to worry about being criticized for not doing the required "curriculum". Also during Discovery, I had a tutoring program where upper grade students came to read stories to my children and help them with other literacy tasks, such as language experience. I sold it as a

writing program to their teachers, who gladly got rid of their absolute worst students for one period. I trained the tutors to work in pairs where the child would dictate a story to one tutor as the other tutor furiously wrote down what the child was saying. It worked out pretty well, because even the roughest and toughest kids, when put with five-year-olds, have a desire to do the right thing and to be good role models. The big kids also learned certain skills like putting together puzzles from the little kids. A real learning exchange was going on.

In structuring the class, I wanted to be a moot presence. I taught the kids how to take care of, organize and run the class. Children had the freedom to do anything messy, like painting or baking cakes, but they had to clean up afterwards. They put up the bulletin boards, which I helped them with the first time and then later they did it them themselves. They did a lot of organizational stuff that the teacher or assistant often does (e.g., cleaning, filling glue jars, checking homework, making team lists or signing up for particular activities.) Taking responsibility for the class also taught them many skills. For example, to keep the library in order, children learned to categorize books by language (English, Cambodian or Mien) and by non-fiction or fiction.

Mien Native Language Development

Because literacy and literature are my passion, my goal was to pass on what I love most to children. In presenting many possible environments and ways to approach literacy events, I

wanted children to somehow get hooked into it. What's wonderful about literacy is that it doesn't matter in what language it happens. It's not bound by one language or another. With some extra work, any story can be communicated in the native language.

The first year, since I knew no Mien, I wanted to figure out some way to teach it. Kao, my Mien-speaking assistant, helped bring some native language literacy development into the classroom. After Discovery, while I worked with the whole group, Kao had planning time to read books and think about how to present them in Mien. The available Mien materials were just awful. We only had six little paper pamphlets of poorly translated Mien folktales with accompanying tapes. He ended up retranslating those stories and audiotaping them. To develop other native language literature materials, I checked out lots of English library books for Kao to translate and tape in Mien. We tried to choose stories set in Asia or with Asian characters, because we wanted our kids see themselves in the literature. In addition to class planning time, Kao worked on the stories at home where he consulted with his father for the correct Mien form. The Mien language has different levels of formality, which younger speakers are often unfamiliar with.

A typical day included lots of literacy opportunities where children would either read or listen to 2-3 stories in Mien or English. After Discovery, children engaged in Sustained Loud Reading, where they would read stories with a partner for 20 minutes. Then we would work on a specific literature-related

theme either in whole and small groups. A lot of discussion, storytelling, language experience, hands-on experiences, the arts, and song were integrated into whatever we did. After the large and small group activities, children had time for silent reading. The last activity was a meeting, where we charted what had gone on during the day.

Kao did a great deal of the native language work orally. He didn't do much writing, mostly oral reading and storytelling. We also taped children telling Mien stories. After a couple of years, lots of oral native language was going on. Children could listen to stories told by Kao, by one another, or by Mien tutors. Oral storytelling was developmentally appropriate for my kindergartners. Written Mien language, that uses Mandarin characters, was used less because the Mien language has more of an oral tradition than a written one. Basically, in the Mien culture only priests (who are men) are literate.

Over the years, I kept trying to learn the language, so I could better teach it. I had a hard time with it because my learning mode is so incredibly visual. I am hopeless at it, since it is more oral than written. Because of my limited Mien, that was a big push for getting parents to help me teach it. The parents became my biggest native language resource.

The Process of Getting Parents Involved

I wanted parent involvement on a deep level, but I didn't know how to achieve it. They first started coming on our field trips. Having parents come for field trips seems too much like

suburban parental involvement. Then they came in to prepare for the Mien New Year celebration of making macramé baskets, dying red eggs, and cooking food. That was great, but I find that kind of cultural celebration annoying. Often schools get hung up with "Let's eat all the foods of the world" kinds of celebrations. Multiculturalism shouldn't just be celebrating holidays. Children don't stop being Mien the day after New Years. Having parents come in for that isn't very empowering for them. I don't want them to feel like they're in the zoo on display for those of us who aren't from the culture and don't know about it. This still wasn't the parental involvement that I envisioned.

I started having parents come in to tell children their immigration stories. Because at five years old, most kids didn't remember the journey. Other children were born here. As I gained the parents' confidence, we started taking community walks all over the neighborhood. All 50 of us (30 children and 20 parents) visited everybody's home, videotaping the outside and inside and telling stories about each other's houses. This allowed me to get to know the parents and children better by seeing where they lived. It was a great way to use the community for our mutual learning.

My goal was to recognize parents as teachers to make them legitimate in the class and school world. To do this, I needed to understand the Mien people, their history, values and experiences. I started really learning about them through the Primary Language Learning Record parent conferences, which Kao

translated. That contact helped us build a relationship, where parents began to sense my sincerity. We started having parent meetings on Fridays every two weeks. I stressed the importance of these meetings by calling everybody, telling the kids, or making personal connections. About 20 parents regularly came to these meetings. Then a Mien priest, who worked for the district, began coming to all our meetings. This motivated even more parents to come. I also started attending their community meetings. So we started having this reciprocal relationship.

One of the first meetings, I talked about how I wanted to teach a Mien curriculum. I especially wanted to focus on the things that Mien children knew how to do in Laos, which were still important even though they had moved to this new context. I had the priest ask the parents if they were willing to teach with me in the classroom. After ten minutes of silence with people just looking around, the men and women went into two separate groups and there was all kinds of talking. I was in the dark. I thought, "Oh Lord!" Finally, the priest said, "Yes, they'll come. The women will come on Mondays and the men on Wednesdays."

The men began teaching about hunting and the history of pea shooters and the women taught the cross-stitch embroidery. The arts was a jumping off place to begin. A core group of about six fathers and eight to ten mothers came in regularly. The groups varied depending on parents' schedules and childcare arrangements. We eventually had childcare within the room, which

was an additional part of working this out.

Reciprocal Parent-Teacher Relationships

I wanted to foster a reciprocal relationship with the parents. I'm not very credible if I come on as the person who knows it all. No. My strength is that I can operate well within this system, because I'm a member of it. I know how to fight it, how to be the squeaky wheel, and how to help you get what you want. But, I don't know how to be Mien. Nor do I know how to teach children appropriately what it means to be Mien and Mien-American.

Unfortunately, what's happening with older Mien children is that they want to be totally American and completely deny their heritage. They're heavily influenced by television and peers. Positive Mien values are being lost such as, commitment to the family, respect for elders, the connection with nature, and care for the environment. These are values that the American culture has lost. We could learn much from the Mien in that way. In order to avoid the negative aspects of assimilation, my role as a bilingual teacher was to validate the parents and help them promote those values. In conferences, I wanted to find out what was relevant for five-year-olds to know in Laos or Thailand, and teach those things with the parents' help. Different cultures expect very different things of children. As a community in transition, parents frequently told me that because life was so different there, children can't do the same things here. For instance, in the Thai refugee camps, children had to stand guard.

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Children in Laos are expected to do all sorts of things, which they learned by watching parents and extended family members. Girls, more than boys, had minor cooking, cleaning, childcare and gardening responsibilities. Five-year-old girls were already embroidering their elaborate wedding outfits, which require a phenomenal amount of work. Because the Mien in Laos were great foragers of edible plants, both boys and girls had to know about farming, foraging and harvesting. Young children can identify what's a poison mushroom and what's not. They eat a lot of things that we wouldn't think of. And that knowledge was fostered when they were carried on their mother's back. In fact, I learned a lot about edible plants during my last semester when we really got into Mien cooking.

Botany and plants did begin to come into my curriculum. Had I continued teaching, I would have focussed the curriculum more on botany and classification skills. The domains of science dovetails with what the academic world values. And I was hoping to find concepts and skills from their culture that intersect with what is valued here. Cultural things, like embroidery and the arts, aren't valued so much in our society, while science definitely is. Teaching botany is a way to come together with the mainstream society, while still being culturally appropriate for Mien people. It's a way for our society to value the knowledge that the Mien bring. There needs to be room in the "canon" for that which has been learned in a non-traditional setting.

I Tried to Marshall All the Possible Support

I knew I couldn't do it alone. I organized the kids, the parents, a university graduate student, a Coast Guard volunteer, and the tutors to help us. The graduate student came in three days a week to videotape and debrief what was going on in the classroom. A woman from the Coast Guard observed and took ethnographic notes of leadership patterns among children.

People enviously commented, "Julia has all this help." I did have a priest come in regularly. It was not like all this help just automatically came to my doorstep. I went out and worked the streets to get them involved and to care. That was part of my role as a teacher. I worked hard for that help and I saw it as important to making the classroom a place that worked for children. Realizing that I only have so much energy as an individual, I had to decide where to put my energy. I tried to use the human resources I could get to the best of their abilities. My job was to try to help parents feel successful in the classroom. Sometimes managing all the different people who were constantly coming in was a bit stressful.

Parental Involvement Beyond the Classroom

By my last year, parents had become quite involved with the curriculum. They continued coming in regularly sharing their traditions and rituals. Men taught boys how to make these bamboo birth announcement objects. The Mien hang these objects outside a home to announce the healthy birth of a child. To make them, they searched for bamboo, which they stripped and shaped.

Storytelling and discussion was always incorporated into whatever the parents taught, so there was lots of language development.

I wanted parents to have place not just in this kindergarten classroom, but in the larger school. They didn't know that their voice counted in school decisions. They needed to learn about their rights and their responsibilities, so they could better advocate for their children. I wasn't able to teach them how to advocate within this mainstream system, until they had already educated me a lot about their community and their culture.

With another Spanish bilingual colleague, we organized the parents to take more action in school governance. We did this by getting Spanish and Mien-speaking parents elected to the principal selection committee. To get them elected, we attended some committee meetings, which had been run by the same people for 20-25 years. The members, whose children were grown, were no longer very connected with the school. No member represented the 80% Limited English Proficient student population. At these meetings, we realized why nobody wanted to be on the committees. The members were rude, unkind, snotty, especially if something was said in another language. They were horrible to me and to each other.

To prepare for committee elections, the Spanish bilingual teacher worked with her Spanish-speaking parents and I with the Mien. I wanted the Mien parents to understand that you can't just send one person to speak for the 200 people in your group, as they would in the Mien community. No, it doesn't work that

way. All 200 people have to go and vote. Not being from here, they weren't familiar with this. No wonder that the "English Only" people ran the show, because they were the ones who knew how the game worked.

Our Friday parent meetings shifted from discussing curriculum issues to school-related concerns. The priest encouraged parents to voice their concerns about making the school better. Their concerns dealt with school lunches and safety because kids and parents were getting beat up. We told parents that the school was supposed to address these issues. They said nobody was listening to them. They thought they couldn't be elected to committees because they didn't speak English. I told them, "There's no law that says you have to speak English to be on committees." Of course, the school prefers not to have to hire a translator. But if they need to hire someone, they'll just have to do it.

On the election night, we all went to the meeting. Never before had more than 30 people come to those meetings. Between the Mien and Hispanic parents, 350 people filled the auditorium! Of course, the assistant superintendent said that they wanted English-speaking representatives to be nominated. As the priest translated, I whispered, "Be sure to tell them that was an illegal statement and that they don't have to speak English." When they called for the vote, we were victorious! Four parents (two Mien and two Hispanic) were elected! All the "English Only" committee members were very, very angry with us. No one could

believe what happened. We could have handled it better, because we pit the bilinguals against the "English Onlys." We should have done more outreach to other community members to have a more balanced support base.

We had gotten people to the point where they had some power and knew how to get on committees. They knew they could make a difference. We still had to work with them to help them with the decision-making process. They needed to learn what kinds of questions to ask and how to get action taken on their concerns. But just the very basics of electing them to committees and having a say was such a big victory. The parents felt so good.

Lack of Continuance

Because my class was the only one that used the native language, there wasn't much continuity in Mien instruction after students left kindergarten. Unfortunately, one year wasn't enough native language exposure and cultural validation to prepare children to survive. At least, I was trying to give my students a sense that school could be a good place, which gave them something positive to hold onto. They were never again allowed to speak Mien in school. I knew this because many of my former students came back to my classroom as tutors.

The lack of use of Mien indicated all the work still needed to be done to educate teachers to be more sensitive to Mien students. This was especially difficult because many of the teachers had been there for 20-25 years. Their prevailing belief was that "This is America. To become American, you must speak

English." We had to wait until they retired. Turning the school around to make it a more supportive place was going to take a long time.

When I left to do my doctoral studies, all that I had struggled for in terms of native language instruction and parents involved the classroom was not continued. Parents still participated on the school committees. The priest continued his involvement with the parents. I maintain contact with the Mien community through native language study and by attending community meetings. In deciding to pursue graduate work in teacher education, I want to take the fight to a different arena, where I can have greater impact. The ideal would be to work with young Southeast Asian people to go into bilingual teaching. It's not enough to be a single fighter, I want to help others gain leadership and fighting abilities so the Mien community can develop their own leaders.

Discussion

Julia's story exemplified what Hargreaves (1996) recommended that non-maintream voices be studied within different contexts. Much can be learned from remarkable teachers like Julia. Julia, having no knowledge of the Mien language, history or people, gained access to the community knowledge and values through her sensitivity to and respect for her students and their families. She was not intimidated by the lack of support for Mien bilingual education, as were her colleagues. She did not accept the limitations of having an ambiguous bilingual program

or the lack of native language materials. Rather she worked extremely hard to develop many sources of support from cross-age tutors, a university graduate student, community volunteers (e.g., a priest), the Mien-speaking teaching assistant, and most importantly the parents who made the curriculum come alive for the children. In her words, "I couldn't do it alone."

Julia found a way to validate and use the native language, even though she could not speak it. Most Mien lay people are unable to read because written Mien language is only for priests, therefore there were no Mien texts available. Julia brought the Mien language into the classroom through parents who spoke it and told stories to the children. She also encouraged her assistant to translate and tape English stories.

Her collaboration with parents made space for them to teach what was important to their children (e.g., cultural traditions, family values, folklore, as well as botany and scientific classification skills.) She intuitively enacted what Moll (1992) terms the "funds of knowledge," using parents' sociocultural knowledge and values as a primary curriculum source. Her story shows her commitment to building a community of learners, first beginning with her own learning about the community's cultural and knowledge resources.

Julia's ability to build a community of learners came from her deep caring and respect for children and parents. These trusting relationships grew over time through reciprocal efforts. Her stance was not one of teacher as all knower imposing the

mainstream ways. Rather she used her strengths as a member of the mainstream to advocate for the community and to teach them to do so for themselves, while honoring what the children and their parents bring. As a "cultural negotiator" (Montero-Sieburth and Perez, 1987), she made visible the mainstream norms and expectations while validating those from home culture. She created a context in which being Mien was appreciated.

Many educational reformers recommend that schools use parents as partners for authentic exchange, but often parents are engaged in ritualistic activities (e.g. bake sales, field trips, and PTA meetings.) Julia's story is a vivid example of real participation and how she was able to create a context for it. Her story well exemplifies McCaleb's (1994) family education principles:

> 1. Teachers and their students are co-participants in the learning process. ...
> 2. New knowledge is built on old knowledge. ...
> 3. Parents and communities need to be seen as equal contributors of understanding and knowledge to the educative process. ...
> 4. Through analysis and critique, all people are capable of engaging in actions that may transform their present realities. (pp. 25-26)

Julia used the window of opportunity opened by administrative neglect to enrich the curriculum. She went outside the school for field trips and constantly brought human and material resources into her class. This administrative neglect, on one hand, can give some teachers space to be active and creative, like Julia. But this neglect, on the other hand, also leaves room for others to be passive. As Julia's story

shows, administrative neglect can allow innovation, but this neglect can also cause innovation to die. Leadership, vision and support are needed to ensure that innovative practices are not just sporadic occurrences. So often school-based decision making teams just represent the concerns of a selected few who know how the system works and who know how to participate. Assistance for non-mainstream parents is needed so parents can learn to more effectively participate in the classroom and school. School personnel need to validate immigrant families and not see them from a deficit perspective. Parents need to feel welcome in the classroom and school to share and develop their strengths. Julia's validation of parents, not only had positive academic effects on students, but empowered parents in school governance committees and decision-making.

When Julia left the school after so much struggle and accomplishment, the positive classroom climate and support for the native language and parents left with her. The school culture needs broad-based support mechanisms so that an innovation is not lost when those implementing it are no longer there to carry it out (Sarason, 1982). Valuable innovation is sometimes punished, and the innovators are discouraged or chased away. It is a loss to education when a teacher like Julia leaves the profession, because the children and families, whom she adores, no longer benefit from her services. In spite of the fact that what she worked so hard to create was not sustained, she did have a tremendous impact on her students and their

families. Her story is significant because it shows what a talented hard-working creative teacher can accomplish by opening herself and her classroom to the parents and community resources. Schools need to be places where this kind of innovative practice is encouraged, recognized, and sustained.

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Appendix A

Sample interview questions:

*How and why did you become a bilingual teacher? How long have you been a bilingual teacher? What grades have you taught?

*What bilingual teacher education did you have? Discuss the quality. What was most helpful about your courses/training? What would have been more helpful?

*Give some background about the community where you teach (immigration changes, SES and education levels of parents, occupations, languages/dialects spoken, visions for their children). How has this changed over the years?

*What bilingual program model is implemented at your school? How well does it serve language minority students? How much time is devoted to the two languages?

*Talk about the strategies/approaches you use (or have used) in teaching first and second languages, culture and content areas.

*Talk about some of the successes you have seen with your students.

*How are language and other academic achievements tested? Are there problems with testing procedures? What practices could improve the assessment of language minority children's language and skills?

*What support have you received from others (administrators, colleagues, and parents)? What could better help you in your work?

*Talk about curriculum and materials. What could improve them?

*How involved are parents in their children's education? Discuss your approaches in involving parents. What could help to improve their involvement?

*What advice would you give to a new bilingual teacher about bilingual education? What advice would you give to a veteran monolingual teacher about teaching language minority children who have recently been placed in her class?